

TELLING NUMBERS

2.2 billion people worldwide living with eye conditions, preventable in 1 billion: WHO



At an eye operation camp in Chandigarh in 2012. Express Archive

THE WORLD Health Organization (WHO) released its first World Vision Report this week, proposing ways to address challenges such as integrating eye care into healthcare systems. The report found that globally, over 2.2 billion people have a vision impairment. In a telling finding, the report said that out of these 2.2 billion, 1 billion people are suffering from conditions that are preventable, or unaddressed. A majority of the cases among these 1 billion cases are of unaddressed presbyopia, at 826 million. This is followed by unaddressed refractive error, at over 120 million. Rural communities, low-income countries and older people bear the brunt of these impairments, the report said. For instance, the age-specific prevalence of presenting distance vision impairment in an urban population of Delhi (20% prevalence among 60-69-year-olds) was one-third lower than that of a rural population in Northern India (28%). The report estimated that over 11.9 million globally have conditions such as glaucoma, trachoma and diabetic retinopathy, which could have been prevented. The estimated cost of preventing conditions among these 11.9 million people is over \$5.8 billion. Surgeries for cataract, which is the leading cause of blindness globally, have shown improvements over time, in low middle-income countries. In

PEOPLE LIVING WITH EYE CONDITIONS (2.2 BILLION)	
Myopia	2,600 mn
Age-related macular degeneration	196 mn
Diabetic retinopathy	146 mn
Glaucoma	76 mn
Trachomatous trichiasis	2.5 mn
Presbyopia	1.8 mn
PEOPLE WITH PREVENTABLE/ UNADDRESSED EYE CONDITIONS (1 BILLION)	
Unaddressed refractive error	123.7 mn
Cataract	65.2 mn
Glaucoma	6.9 mn
Corneal opacities	4.2 mn
Diabetic retinopathy	3 mn
Trachoma	2 mn
Unaddressed presbyopia	826 mn

India the rate of cataract surgery has increased nine-fold (6,000 per million population) between 1981 and 2012. This has been possible due to the National Programme for Control of Blindness, which was launched in 1976 and under which cataract surgeries were performed on 6.5 million people in 2016-2017, the report said.

THIS WORD MEANS

ELASTOCALORIC EFFECT

Cooling effect produced by twisting and untwisting of rubber bands. Can it be used in a fridge?

WHEN RUBBERS bands are twisted and untwisted, it produces a cooling effect. This is called the "elastocaloric" effect, and researchers have suggested that it can be used in a very relevant context today. Researchers from multiple universities, including Nankai University in China, have found that the elastocaloric effect, if harnessed, may be able to do away with the need of fluid refrigerants used in fridges and air-conditioners. These fluids are susceptible to leakages, and can contribute to global warming. The results of the research were published in the journal *Science* on Friday. In the elastocaloric effect, the transfer of heat works much the same way as when fluid refrigerants are compressed and expanded. When a rubber band is stretched, it absorbs heat from its environment, and when it is released, it grad-

ually cools down. In order to figure out how the twisting mechanism might be able to enable a fridge, the researchers compared the cooling power of rubber fibres, nylon and polyethylene fishing lines and nickel-titanium wires. They observed high cooling from twisted changes in twisted, coiled and supercoiled fibres. They reported that the level of efficiency of the heat exchange in rubber bands "is comparable to that of standard refrigerants and twice as high as stretching the same materials without twisting". To demonstrate this setup, the researchers developed a fridge the size of a ballpoint pen cartridge that was able to bring down the temperature of a small volume of water by 8°C in a few seconds. They suggested that their findings may lead to the development of greener, higher-efficiency and low-cost cooling technology.

SIMPLY PUT

Delhi diplomacy to fight disaster

At climate summit in New York, PM Modi pushed the global Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure. As world observes International Day for Disaster Reduction, a look at the initiative India has taken

AMITABH SINHA
 PUNE, OCTOBER 11

WHILE SPEAKING at the UN Secretary General's Climate Action Summit in New York on September 23, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had announced the launch of the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI) and invited all countries to join it. Ahead of International Day for Disaster Reduction on Sunday, a look at what CDRI is.

What it proposes to do

Envisaged as an international knowledge platform where countries can collaborate to make their existing and new infrastructure strong enough to withstand natural disasters, CDRI is the fruition of at least three years of discussions that India has had with more than 40 countries on this subject.

In simple terms, CDRI is an attempt to bring countries together to share and learn from the experiences of one another to protect their key infrastructure — highways, railways, power stations, communication lines, water channels, even housing — against disasters.

Need to protect infrastructure

Many countries, including India, have over the years developed robust disaster management practices that have helped in sharply reducing human casualties in a disaster. However, the economic costs of a disaster remain huge, mainly due to the damage caused to big infrastructure.

According to a recent estimate by the World Bank, Cyclone Fani, which hit Odisha in May this year, caused damage to the tune of \$4 billion. The losses in the Kerala floods last year could be in excess of \$4.4 billion, according to a post-disaster needs assessment report by the state government. In the US, there were 10 climate change disasters this year in which losses exceeded \$1 billion.

Much of the developing world is still building its basic infrastructure. Many developed countries are also in the process of replacing old infrastructure that have completed their lifetimes. Future infrastructure needs to take into account the heightened risks arising out



The Biju Patnaik International Airport in Bhubaneswar during Cyclone Fani earlier this year. The World Bank estimates the damage caused by Fani at \$4 billion. ANI

of the increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather events and other adverse impacts of climate change. Even existing infrastructure would need to be retrofitted to make them more resilient. Disaster-proofing a project would involve changes in design, and use of newer technologies. These involve additional costs which, however, are only a fraction of the losses that a disaster can bring.

"We have pretty good evidence to show that wherever we have made investments in making infrastructure more resilient, over a period of time that investment has basically paid for itself," said Kamal Kishore, member of National Disaster Management Authority. The NDMA is operating as the interim secretariat of CDRI as of now.

An international forum

Disaster preparedness and infrastructure creation are largely national endeavours. However, modern infrastructure is also a web of networked systems, not always confined to national boundaries. There are increasing numbers of trans-national and trans-continental highways and railways; transmission lines carry electricity across countries; assets on a river are shared. Damage to any one node can have cascading impacts on the entire network, resulting in loss of livelihoods

and disruption in economic activity in places far away from the site of a disaster.

To make entire networks resilient is the main thought behind the Indian initiative of CDRI. The platform is not meant to plan or execute infrastructure projects. Nor is it an agency that will finance infrastructure projects in member countries. Instead, CDRI will seek to identify and promote best practices, provide access to capacity building, and work towards standardisation of designs, processes and regulations relating to infrastructure creation and management. It would also attempt to identify and estimate the risks to, and from, large infrastructure in the event of different kinds of disasters in member countries.

CDRI hopes to have as its members not just countries, but organisations like UN bodies, financial institutions, and other groups working on disaster management. It seeks to help member countries integrate disaster management policies in all their activities, set up institutions and regulatory provisions to ensure creation of resilient infrastructure, and identify and use affordable finance and technology.

CDRI and Belt Road Initiative

CDRI has sometimes been seen as India's response to the Belt Road Initiative, China's ongoing multi-billion-dollar programme to recre-

ate the ancient Silk Route trading links. China is building massive new land and maritime infrastructure in several countries. India and some other nations view this as an attempt by China to use its economic and military heft to usurp strategic assets in other countries.

Though the comparisons are not surprising given the competing strategic interests of the two neighbours, the magnitude and purpose of the two initiatives are starkly different. Unlike BRI, CDRI is not an attempt by India to create or fund infrastructure projects in other countries. Having said that, international initiatives like these are not without any strategic or diplomatic objective.

CDRI and Solar Alliance

A more relevant comparison of CDRI can, however, be made with the International Solar Alliance (ISA) that India launched at the climate meeting in Paris in 2015. ISA, which has evolved into a treaty-based organisation with more than 50 countries already signed up, aims at a collective effort to promote the deployment of solar energy across the world. Its objective is to mobilise more than \$1 trillion into solar power by 2030, and to deploy over 1,000 GW of solar generation capacity in member countries by that time. India hosts ISA, with its headquarters in Gurgaon.

The CDRI secretariat too would be based in New Delhi. While it is not envisioned to take the shape of a treaty-based organisation, CDRI can be seen as complementing ISA's efforts. ISA is about climate change mitigation — deployment of more solar energy would bring down the reliance on fossil fuels, thereby reducing greenhouse gas emissions. CDRI, on the other hand, is about adapting to climate change, a need that is inevitable.

With these two initiatives, India is seeking to obtain a leadership role, globally, in matters related to climate change.

Kishore of NDMA stressed, however, that CDRI is more than just a climate change initiative. "It does not matter whether the infrastructure is risk from climate-induced disasters or those taking place due to geophysical reasons, like earthquakes, volcanoes, landslides or tsunamis. The infrastructure needs to be strengthened to cope with all these," he said.

FACT CHECK, GROUND REALITY

Killer cyanide in Kerala: how is it monitored?

There are licences, permits. But in 2002, when 250 kg of the lethal toxin was seized; accused was fined Rs 250

SHAJU PHILIP
 THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, OCTOBER 11

POLICE IN Kerala have arrested a woman for allegedly killing her husband, parents-in-law and three other members of the extended family over a period of 14 years using cyanide. The chemical was allegedly supplied to the woman by a jewellery salesman who procured it from a goldsmith. Both have been arraigned as accused in the case.

Cyanide is used in the extraction and polishing of gold, and for gold-plating. The ornament industry uses the chemical to give gold its reddish yellow colour, believed to be the "original" colour of the metal, and for ridding it of impurities.

Kerala is among the country's biggest consumers of gold jewellery. How is cyanide stocked in the state, and how is its distribution regulated?

The law and monitoring

The stocking and sale of cyanide is regu-

lated by The Kerala Poisons Rules, 1996, which were notified under The Poisons Act, 1919, which empowers state governments "to regulate possession for sale and sale of any poison".

The Drugs Control Department under the Government of Kerala's Health Department issues permits for stocking cyanide for professional use, and licences to stock and sell the chemical. Any individual or institution can apply for both under relevant sections of The Kerala Poisons Rules, 1996. The applicant must have a valid and legal reason to seek the permit or licence, as well as a technically qualified person to oversee the storage and handling of the lethal toxin.

Number of permits, licences

The Drugs Control Department says only 35 agencies — research institutions, universities, academic bodies, or labs in the government or private sector — have permits to stock cyanide.

An agency can at a time stock only 250 grams; the average annual cyanide intake of an institute in Kerala is 250 g to 500 g.

Cyanide crystals come in packets of 250 g. The chemical has an expiry date of three years from manufacture. Permits have to be renewed every year.

There are no valid cyanide licences — meant for sale of the chemical — in Kerala at present.

Legal source of the chemical

Cyanide is legally sourced from a Mumbai-based agency, which sells the chemical under strict restrictions to institutions or individuals who are able to furnish the relevant certificate issued by the Drugs Control Department. The permit-holder has to appear in person before the agency to procure the allotted quantity of chemical.

Smuggling and illegal imports

The industrial use of cyanide is allegedly dependent on smuggling or illegal imports. The small quantities involved make it difficult to detect and seize illegal consignments, officials said. A police officer of the rank of Sub-Inspector can *suo motu* register a case of

illegal trade in cyanide.

The last seizure of cyanide that officials could recall took place in 2002, when sales tax officials at an inter-state border checkpoint in Palakkad seized 250 kg of the chemical from a truck. The consignment, imported from Australia, was meant for an individual in Kozhikode. Investigations revealed the chemical was meant for the gold industry. The accused individual was convicted and fined a paltry Rs 250 as per the law.

What Kerala proposes to do

State Drugs Controller Ravi S Menon said it is proposed to amend The Kerala Poisons Rules in the wake of recurring incidents of acid attacks, as the use and stocking of acid also come under the purview of the Rules. "We are planning to bring the use and stock of cyanide under the ambit of the proposed amendment in ways such that the accessibility of the public to cyanide is reduced. We also plan to incorporate sections to reduce the toxicity of the cyanide that is made available," Menon said.

Abiy Ahmed Ali, Laureate, for Peace in Horn of Africa: what was his role?

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
 NEW DELHI, OCTOBER 11

ETHIOPIAN PRIME Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali was awarded the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize on Friday for "his important work to promote reconciliation, solidarity and social justice". In its citation, the Norwegian Nobel Committee said: "Abiy Ahmed Ali has initiated important reforms that give many citizens hope for a better life and a brighter future."

What Abiy did

When Abiy became Prime Minister in 2018, Ethiopia had been locked in conflict with Eritrea for 20 years. In July that year, the former Army officer-turned-PM, then 41, stepped across the border, held Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki in a warm embrace and signalled the beginning of a peace effort, announcing to the world that war was no longer an option. The Nobel Committee noted how Abiy, in cooperation with Afwerki, worked out the

principles of a peace agreement, set out in declarations the two leaders signed in Asmara during that July visit and in Jeddah in September. It also listed domestic achievements by Abiy in his first 100 days as Prime Minister — lifting Emergency, granting amnesty to thousands of political prisoners, discontinuing media censorship, legalising outlawed opposition groups, dismissing military and civilian leaders suspected of corruption, and increasing the influence of women in political and community life.

The conflict, its roots

The stalemate Abiy helped break is about a border dispute that began in 1998. Conflict between the two countries, however, has a longer history. Eritrea, once an Italian colony, was merged with Ethiopia in 1936 during Benito Mussolini's regime, then taken over by the British during the Second World War. After the War, a United Nations declaration in 1950 made Eritrea part of a federation with Ethiopia. When Eritrean groups launched



Ethiopia PM Abiy Ahmed (left), who has won the Nobel, helped usher in peace after reaching out to Eritrea President Isaias Afwerki (right). Reuters/File

a struggle for independence in 1961, Ethiopia dissolved the federation and annexed Eritrea in 1962. After a war that lasted 30 years, Eritrea gained international recognition as an independent country in 1993. Just five years later, however, war broke out over the control of Badme, a border town both countries coveted. The violence, which

went on until an agreement to cease hostilities in 2000, claimed 80,000 lives and separated countless families. Since then, the two countries were in a state the Nobel Committee described as "no peace, no war".

What peace brings

In the two agreements during and after



called Eritrean numbers randomly, and vice versa, just to speak to someone on the other side, simply because they could. Others tracked down parents, siblings and friends," *The New York Times* reported.

Ethiopia is Africa's second largest country by population, but landlocked, while tiny Eritrea is connecting by sea to the Middle East. Through the years of conflict, Ethiopia had depended heavily on Djibouti for access to the Gulf of Aden and onward to the Arabian Sea. The peace deal opened up Eritrean ports for Ethiopian use.

Challenges ahead

While the peace effort is a step forward, ethnic rivalries in Ethiopia have flared in recent years and the country has millions of internally displaced refugees. "No doubt some people will think this year's prize is being awarded too early. The Norwegian Nobel Committee believes it is now that Abiy Ahmed's efforts deserve recognition and need encouragement," the Committee said. It acknowledged Afwerki too: "Peace does not arise from the actions of one party alone. When Prime Minister Abiy reached out his hand, President Afwerki grasped it..."



WORDLY WISE
BOXING IS REAL EASY. LIFE IS MUCH HARDER.
— FLOYD MAYWEATHER, JR.

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

WHAT PMC MEANS

Financial sector scams are a warning: RBI must raise its game to remain a step ahead of the entities it regulates

AT LEAST three of the major financial sector scams in the last couple of months in India, featuring Punjab National Bank, IL&FS, some private banks and now the latest, Punjab and Maharashtra Cooperative Bank or PMC, apart from poor governance and fraudulent practices, a common thread has been supervisory failure. The country's leading financial sector regulator, the RBI, has been shown as flat-footed, responding only after the event. Like in IL&FS, in the PMC case too, there appears to be culpability on the part of the management and the board of the bank considering that the bank's loan exposure to a single firm, HDIL, alone constituted 73 per cent of its assets and several dummy accounts were created to camouflage this. But often, the issue of dual control by the RBI and state governments has been cited as a hurdle by the regulator for its inability to effectively supervise cooperative banks.

That may be true to an extent, given the limitations in superceding the board of directors or removing directors of these banks, unlike in commercial banks. Yet that alone cannot be a shield for the central bank, considering the role of co-operative banks in ensuring credit delivery to the unorganised sector and last mile access, especially to small businesses, over the last few decades in an economy where the large banks continue to focus on bigger cities and towns. As a recent RBI report shows, fund flows to the commercial sector have declined by close to 88 per cent in the first six months of this current fiscal — to Rs 90,495 crore in mid-September compared to Rs 7.38 lakh crore during the same period a year ago. That would have surely hurt small businessmen, traders and the farm sector. A remarkable feature since liberalisation, has been the resilience of India's financial sector, which may also have to do with the dominance of government-owned institutions or lenders and a strong central bank. If that track record is not to be sullied, clearly, the RBI will have to raise its game on the supervisory front to remain a step ahead of the entities it regulates.

The central bank has already started building an internal cadre for supervision of banks and other entities aimed at enhancing its oversight capabilities. Hopefully, this will be complemented by legislative changes which could lead to greater regulatory control and powers for the RBI over cooperative banks and an insolvency regime for financial firms as indicated by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman. India needs not just a few large banks and lenders with a national or regional presence but also other players such as cooperative banks, small finance and payment banks. There are voices seeking greater accountability on the part of India's financial regulators. The risk it holds is the prospect of supervisors swinging to the other extreme while poring over the books of banks and compounding the problem, besides stifling innovation. Carving out a separate authority for supervision may only lead to regulators working in silos. With a weakening economy, the last thing India needs is the unravelling of more such firms stoking fears of financial instability.

The policy way out

Economic slowdown may be structural, not cyclical. It calls for removal of bottle-necks, long-term reform



AMARTYA LAHIRI

IT IS BY now clear that India is in the middle of a sharp growth slowdown. The debate surrounding the slowdown is whether it is a cyclical downturn or a structural correction. Diagnosing the problem is key for devising policy responses. Cyclical slowdowns can be dealt with using temporary fiscal and monetary stimulus. Structural problems, on the other hand, require long-run policy responses.

There are a few clues that point to the slowdown being structural rather than cyclical. For one, most of the growth between 2014 and 2017 was represented by a windfall revenue gain of USD 75 billion annually, or 3 per cent of GDP. Since the fiscal deficit barely moved, the government effectively used the windfall to finance various government schemes. Now that oil prices have reverted towards their previous levels, maintaining a stable fiscal deficit has necessitated a reduction in government expenditures.

The above suggests that absent the oil windfall, Indian growth over this period would have been 2-3 percentage points lower annually. Put differently, the economic slowdown has been ongoing for almost four years now. Cyclical downturns last a few quarters, maybe a year. Negative growth pressures for four years indicate structural problems.

A second clue that the problems are structural can be gleaned from the behaviour of investment demand. Throughout the period 2016-2018, a number of commentators and industry representatives kept up a drumbeat of criticism of the Monetary Policy Committee's refusal to cut rates. The argument was that high real interest rates, along with the restrictions imposed by the Reserve Bank of India on banks' lending in order to deal with the NPA problem, were jointly re-

sponsible for low investment demand. Since the beginning of 2019, both the monetary policy stance as well as the Prompt Corrective Action (PCA) norms have been relaxed by the RBI under a much more pliable RBI leadership. However, investment demand has barely moved in response.

The good news is that dealing with structural problems doesn't require fiscal spending. Instead, it involves non-pecuniary costs. The government has to expend some of its considerable political capital in order to usher in long-term labour and land reforms. These aren't easy because the state governments have to be roped in to get these reforms going. The move to lower the corporate tax rate is a good one. It has the characteristic of a capital market structural reform as long as it is not used as a temporary fiscal measure. The government needs to signal unambiguously to markets that this is a permanent reduction of the base rate. Else, the uncertainty surrounding the longevity of the tax cut will undo a lot of its potential upside.

The financial infrastructure within which the economy operates is another key structural bottleneck that needs to be addressed urgently. At the centre of this problem is the public sector banking network which accounts for 75 per cent of India's banking assets. Public sector banks introduce two complications to the financial system. First, they allow for capture of the credit allocation system by non-market forces. Second, since the regulator of banks is the RBI which is itself owned by the government, this amounts to the regulator regulating the entity that it itself is reporting to! This system is subject to regulatory capture. The government can induce regulatory changes by just changing the personnel it appoints to the upper management of the RBI or to its board, a scenario that played out in gory detail over the last year.

India needs to urgently begin reducing the importance of public sector banks in the

economy. This can be done either through privatisation of existing public sector banks or through the granting of banking licenses to private operators. Given that the on-tap banking licenses on offer have attracted little interest so far suggests that the privatisation of public sector banks needs to be prioritised.

One of the few transformative ideas that was put forth in the July budget was issuing sovereign bonds. Unfortunately, it appears to have run into headwinds. The idea needs to be pursued for multiple reasons. First, sovereign bonds would force government debt to be priced in a more competitive setting. Currently, it is priced in a sheltered domestic bond market. Second, issuing sovereign bonds will force greater clarity and transparency of macroeconomic data since international creditors will demand that. Lastly, things like failure to achieve policy targets or reticence in releasing data will attract rapid punishment by markets. This fear will provide greater discipline to policymaking.

The government would also do well to revisit the appointments process to key technical and regulatory bodies. Functions like monetary policy, banking supervision, data collection and dissemination, audit of government financial accounts, are all technical jobs. Moreover, they need to be independent of government direction. It is crucial that technically competent people manage the institutions that oversee these functions. Appointing career bureaucrats with little to no domain training or background to run them doesn't help in either facilitating functional competence or in signaling the independence of these institutions from government control. Domain competence needs to be prioritised.

The writer is professor of economics, Royal Bank research professor and Johal Chair, University of British Columbia, Canada. Views are personal

HITTING OUT

India's statement on Turkey's military offensive may have more to do with Pakistan. That may not be wise

THE STATEMENT BY Delhi expressing "deep concern" at Turkey's military offensive in the northeastern region of Syria which has a dominant Kurdish population, and expressing fears for the stability of the region and the fight against terrorism is, in all probability, what it seems to be — a hit at Turkey for its critical statements against India on Kashmir. On August 6, a day after the government announced its decision to revoke the special status of J&K and bifurcate the state into two Union Territories, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan had expressed concern that it "could further increase the existing tensions". Later, he was the first to speak at the UN General Assembly to raise the Kashmir issue and say that the world had "failed" to pay attention to what was happening there. It is not incidental here that the Turkey-Pakistan friendship goes back many decades: In recent years, Nawaz Sharif reached out to Erdogan during the attempted military coup against the latter, and visited the Turkish president after he managed to take back control.

It is unusual for India to hit out in this manner. Delhi has not commented before on Turkey's ambivalent role in the crisis that has unfolded in the region since ISIS erupted on the scene in the middle of 2014. In general, India does not comment on actions by a country not in its neighbourhood and unlikely to have an impact, at least immediately, on it. The statement on Turkey may be part of the "with us, or against us" style of diplomacy that has taken hold in South Block in recent years, where a country must profess loyalty to India and be critical of Pakistan to make the cut. This would be all very well if India was an economic powerhouse. But to be struggling along in terms of growth rate, and to make enemies of other nations in this manner, is not the wisest thing to do. As India knows, every country is worth its weight in votes at many multilateral forums. The election of India's nominee to the International Court of Justice at The Hague came in 2017 because of the widespread support that India garnered. As many as 183 countries voted for India's nominee. There were zero votes against him, and 10 abstentions.

Such goodwill may be hard to come by if Delhi goes around dividing its world into Pakistan lovers and Pakistan bashers, and building its foreign relations accordingly. With the India-Pakistan hyphenation it encourages, that would also be so last century.

MAGNIFICENT MARY

She scales another peak, yet again proves the doubters wrong

MARY KOM marched with single-minded intent to a record-breaking 8th World Championship medal this week. This glorious achievement has come in three weight divisions — pin-weight (45 kg), light-flyweight (48 kg) and now the flyweight (51 kg). She was already the best female boxer beating Irish legend, Katie Taylor's, count of six medals, picking the seventh last time. But beating back all mutterings about her capabilities, magnificent Mary assured herself of the eighth, waving a cheery goodbye to Cuban heavyweight Felix Savon, with seven medals from his 20 years of amateur pugilism.

It only needed to be pointed out that none of her medals had come in the Olympic classification of 51 kg, and there she was in Ulan Ude, Russia, thumping the 2016 Games' bronze medalist, Columbia's Valencia Victoria, by a unanimous 5-0 verdict. For two decades now, that's what Mary Kom has done — danced around the ring, proving doubters wrong. She has won world medals when women's boxing was not in the Olympics. Then, when it got included, when she could lord over others in 48 kg, her natural weight, and now when she faces taller and stronger women in 51 kg — often those who scale down from 60 kg retaining their punching prowess even if the weight was down. She's won medals as a late teen, as a mother of twins, and now at 36 after a break when she was an MP in Rajya Sabha. Mary Kom has been told to leave it to younger contenders. To gracefully make way. To rest on her laurels. With this medal, she has earned the right to slam the door on pretenders and their Twitter amplifiers. For if she can't inspire love, she'll make do with instilling fear by waving yet one more medal at critics and opponents.

UNWORTHY NATIONS

Why India must not reject Gandhi and imitate Pakistan



KHALED AHMED

PAKISTAN'S UNIVERSITIES ARE not counted among the world's top universities. In fact, even in Pakistan nobody in pursuit of knowledge sets much store by them. The reason is an ideology based on religion which doesn't brook revision. One thought India would learn from this negative example but it has actually succumbed. Following religion, India can start looking like Pakistan. But what will happen to the Indians and Pakistanis deeply convinced by the "inclusive" faith of Mahatma Gandhi who believed in Hindus and Muslims living together as one nation?

Minds in India and Pakistan have been gradually closing because of wars and fear of the "other", strangely becoming identical in the process. Great Indians were not reexamined after the rift of 1947. Today, as we all look back, Gandhi emerges as the great South Asian genius who couldn't convince Hindus and Muslims to live together; but in later years kept inspiring others like Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela. He went further than anyone else in creating a single nation in India. What is happening now will simply create more "nations" and more conflict. The Khilafat Movement, the biggest Muslim movement in history, was led by him. Today, Muslims have become disenchanted with their Partition brainwash and look at him as a martyr who could have created the kind of India that could live with itself without conflict.

The pain of Partition prevented a correct assessment of leaders struggling to come out from the subjugation of British Raj. Looking back, it is Babasaheb Ambedkar who stands out as the extraordinary man who tried but despaired of Hindu-Muslim unity. He founded the new state, so to speak, because he wrote the secular Constitution of India al-

though he couldn't clearly designate it as such. He wanted those outside the caste system to be considered socially equal but was realistic enough to know that Muslims and Hindus growing up under the divide-and-rule governance of the Raj will not live together after 1947, and wrote the first book on Pakistan as a "separated" state.

The rise of the nation state was bound to influence the thinking of India and Pakistan and give rise to nationalism. It is amazing that it has taken a century to realise the genius of Rabindranath Tagore, who warned the world against nationalism as the wars of nationalism were on in Europe. That three "nation-states" of South Asia — India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka — sing national anthems written by Tagore reminds us of the peace he was thinking of. India ended up producing more leaders of stature because the Hindu community was more evolved intellectually than the others. It is difficult to ignore the fact that the Pakistani recipient of the Nobel Prize for Physics, Abdus Salam, had to travel to India to thank his math teacher, who was a Hindu. Pakistan is weak in math even today because of state ideology. If this is so, why should India reject Gandhi and imitate "ideological" Pakistan?

Had we listened to Gandhi, we could have grown together with the advantage of interaction. William Leitner, a Hungarian Jew who came to India as an educationist, wanted the Muslims of Indian Punjab to learn math and the sciences instead of what was drilled into them in madrasas. His survey of Lahore under Ranjit Singh is discussed by Pakistani scholar Majid Sheikh thus: "What stands out is that the Hindu pundits ran schools which concentrated on Mathematics, Logic, Astrology, Sanskrit and Persian. They had the Chatsalas

for traders and the Pathshalas for religious training, medical education and also for astrology and astronomy. The Sikhs concentrated on Gurumukhi and the Granths. The Muslims taught Arabic, the Quran and Persian, with a few also teaching Urdu, which was a relatively new language for the people. This provides a graphic picture of the mindset of the different communal groups."

If there is anything to learn from this for the Hindutva enthusiasts in South Asia it is this. Religion guides you spiritually and teaches you humanity above all, not violent division based on identity. Leitner tried to furtively introduce this humanity through "new" education for the Muslims in Lahore by founding the Government College Lahore and giving it the motto "Courage to Know", a translation of Latin "Sapere Aude", the motto given by Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) to the Enlightenment in Europe. He never told anyone about the real meaning of the motto till Pakistan's great poet Faiz Ahmad Faiz used it in an Urdu poem after Partition. Today, India and Pakistan should be in peaceful coexistence opening up free trade and aiming at "normalisation" rather than "dispute" resolution.

All disputes will be resolved as a consequence of normalisation. (After all China and India, involved in border skirmishes, have a trade turnover of over \$80 billion.) Bangladesh and India have disputes but "normal relations" have led to them being friends. Result: A prosperous Bangladesh. A "failed" Babu would still have liked an "interactive" South Asia rather than a couple of "nuclearised" states lunging at each other.

The writer is consulting editor, Newsweek Pakistan

OCTOBER 12, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

KOYA IS KERALA CM
WITH THE KERALA governor formally appointing the three-member council of ministers, headed by C H Mohammed Koya of the Muslim League, interest has again shifted to the exercise by the partners of the new political alliance to provide some cohesion and credibility to the set-up. As the state assembly, which was adjourned sine die on October 4 following the resignation of the ministry, is proposed to be convened again, possibly in the third week of this month, a sense of urgency has been introduced in the efforts of the leaders to remove the conflicts among the parties and pave the way for an early expansion of the ministry. It is learnt that a

Harijan legislator who had reportedly rebelled against the leadership of one of the parties which had left the ruling front, is tipped for ministership.

PARTIAL BANDH
THE DELHI BANDH, called by all the main central trade unions to express solidarity with the striking textile workers, was only partially successful. While industrial workers, bankmen and LIC employees mostly abstained from work, the supply of electricity, water and milk remained unaffected. The DTC bus service was normal and autorickshaws and taxis were freely available. Factories and small-scale units were closed

as were Delhi University and Jawaharlal Nehru University. Most of the main markets including Chandni Chowk and Connaught Place were open.

ESPIONAGE CASE
THE SPECIAL BRANCH of the Delhi Police has, in a surprise move, requested the Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate S M Agarwal to discharge the Calcutta businessman C A Martin, an accused in the espionage case which came to light early this year. Martin is a foreign national. Those arrested in the case included a junior government official, Joseph Mahapat. Two members of a diplomatic mission were "asked to leave the country".



Un-civic nationalism

Attempts are being made to dismantle the pluralistic ideas of India that are a legacy of Gandhi and Tagore



C R Sasikumar

trenchant in his criticism of the western idea of the nation-state, "with all its paraphernalia of power and prosperity, its flags and pious hymns... its mock thunders of patriotic bragging", and of how it stokes a national conceit that makes society lose its moral balance. Nehru, who was personally close to Gandhi and ideologically close to Tagore, saw more value in the modern state than they did in providing a unifying structure in a divided society and in unleashing the forces of planned economic development.

By the time the Indian Constitution was framed, both Gandhi and Tagore were dead. Nehru (along with Ambedkar), in leading the way, drew upon the society-centric pluralistic idea of nationalism of Gandhi and Tagore and gave it a legal-judicial form in the Indian Constitution. The Nehru-Ambedkar idea of nationalism, forged and refined through elaborate deliberations of the Constituent Assembly, gave India the basis of its civic nationalism that prevailed for many decades.

It is this inclusive idea of civic nationalism that is now being attempted to be dismantled by the Hindu nationalists. Even at the time of the framing of the Constitution, the RSS had opposed the Constitution as "western", even though in their earlier history, many of their leaders used to admire the ethnic basis of nationalism in a western country, Germany — their revered leaders like Savarkar and Golwalkar had expressed open admiration for the efficient Nazi system of mobilising and organising the German nation. Earlier, Japanese nation-state had also been inspired by German history. It is not surprising that Tagore's lectures in Japan as early as 1916 against the aggrandising nation-state did not make him popular with the Japanese.

In the West, the US is a case where the idea of civic nationalism was pursued (though not always successfully). In a 2009 speech, Barack Obama said: "One of the great

By the time the Indian Constitution was framed both Gandhi and Tagore were dead. Nehru (along with Ambedkar) in leading the way, drew upon the society-centric pluralistic idea of nationalism of Gandhi and Tagore and gave it a legal-judicial form in the Indian Constitution. The Nehru-Ambedkar idea of nationalism, forged and refined through elaborate deliberations of the Constituent Assembly gave India the basis of its civic nationalism that prevailed for many decades.

strengths of the United States is... we do not consider ourselves a Christian nation, (but) a nation of citizens who are bound by ideals and a set of values", presumably as enshrined in the Constitution. This is a major historical example of what the German philosopher Habermas calls "constitutional patriotism", as opposed to patriotism based on "blood and soil" which used to have popular appeal in Germany, and which in history has been associated with a great deal of persecution, violence and devastation. It is this German history that Einstein may have had in mind when he said nationalism is "an infantile disease, the measles of mankind".

This battle of alternative versions of nationalism is raging all over the world today. Our identities are necessarily multi-layered but ethnic nationalists privilege one of these layers, usually based on the narrow particularities of religion, language or culture that makes it easy to mobilise certain groups. In the name of national integration and fighting enemies, both outside and within, they undermine minority rights and procedures of democracy, they accuse liberals of appeasing the minorities (blacks and Hispanics in the US, immigrants in Europe, Kurds in Turkey, Muslims in India), and try to suppress dissent as "anti-national". Civic nationalism, on the other hand, emphasises the procedural aspects of democracy, and through its stress on liberal constitutional values tries to use the pre-commitment of a foundational document to bind the hands of subsequent generations against majoritarian tendencies curbing basic civil rights. If we lose this ideological battle in India, the foundational values of our multi-cultural society that our earlier great social thinkers adored will be in serious danger.

The writer is professor of graduate school at the department of economics, University of California, Berkeley

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"The ditching of Kurdish-led forces threatens to destabilise the region (Syria) further. It is just the latest proof of the dangers of this president's (Trump) foreign dealings." — THE GUARDIAN

Reality calls for simple words

There may not be a word for lynching in most Indian languages. There is no doubt that we need one



SAIKAT MAJUMDAR

"SOUTHERN TREES BEAR a strange fruit," sang Billie Holiday, "Blood on the leaves and blood at the root." What is this strange fruit? Quickly, we get the answer: "Black bodies swingin' in the Southern breeze/ Strange fruit hangin' from the poplar trees"

It is strange fruit. It is strange, of course, because it is no fruit. They are corpses of murdered black men. But it is also strange because that's not where you expect corpses to be. In battlefields, yes. On the roadside, maybe. In the gutter, perhaps. Corpses are not meant to fly in the sky. Hang from trees in droves. That is almost as terrifying as the marching Birnam Wood was to a villainous Macbeth.

It is strange because it is new. Always. Even after 4,743 bodies — the number of people lynched between 1882 and 1968 in the United States, as estimated by the NAACP, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

The "pastoral scene of the gallant South," in Holiday's haunting words, was split open by "the bulgin' eyes and the twisted mouth" of destroyed black bodies, the "scent of magnolias sweet and fresh" suddenly ripped apart by "the sudden smell of burnin' flesh."

But soon, that which is not a fruit becomes one. It suffers the fate of being eaten by birds, flooded by rains, pushed around by the wind, wizened by the sun. In the end, "for the tree to drop." "Here is a fruit for the crows to pluck/For the rain to gather

For the wind to suck/For the sun to rot/For the tree to drop"/Finally, it becomes crop./But what a crop! "Here is a strange and bitter crop"

Outlandish no more, the metaphor enters reality. The English language too, gets a new word: *Lynching*.

It is a word that is most directly associated with the planned but extrajudicial murder of African-American people in the American south, carried out by white groups in public. The alleged crimes were anything from resistance to slavery, attempt to escape to freedom, to charges of sedition to perceptions of threats to white property or person, including sexual threats to white women. As with most of the crimes oppressed and enslaved blacks were accused of committing, most of the alleged violations that led to lynching were unfounded or greatly exaggerated.

"Lynch" came from the phrase "Lynch Law," which was a term for this method of "execution" without trial. The two brothers who lent their names to this phrase were Charles and William Lynch, who lived in Virginia in the 1780s.

The claim made this week by the RSS chief, Mohan Bhagwat, that "lynching" isn't an Indian word has rocked the nation. The uproar isn't just about language — the assumption lurking under this claim, that the practice of lynching too, is alien to India,

is what has taken the nation by storm, most of all, people with conscience who have been tormented by the spate of execution-style murders by frenzied mobs, in most instances, of members of minority groups perceived to have violated customs and beliefs held by the mainstream.

I have to say that Bhagwat is right. Growing up speaking Bangla, I knew the word "gonodholai," public thrashing, the kind that a pickpocket might get if caught in a crowded bus. But every Bengali knows that the word is actually meant to be funny — the kind reserved for the blasphemer who badmouths Rabindranath or Satyajit Ray on a Calcutta street, rather than a real criminal — though we all know many a pickpocket has been treated to its flavour in public as well.

The word in Hindi that the internet keeps suggesting as its equivalent is "hatya". But "hatya" — murder in most Sanskrit-derived Indian languages — is nothing like a pre-planned, extra-judicial murder by a mob, especially that of a member of a disempowered minority.

Does reality create language? Or does language create reality? Thinkers as varied as Ludwig Wittgenstein and Jacques Lacan would have us believe the latter. But reality is always calling out for new words to be added to our dictionaries. "Twerk", "derp", "selfie", "phablet" were all added in the last few years to articulate aspects of contemporary digital culture. Sometimes, as with "mansplaining", it is the work of a new political conscience.

This is what my colleague, the literary scholar and translator Rita Kothari, had to say in her recent social media post: "Should we then create a tatsam Sanskrit word for 'lynching' so that Mr. Bhagwat is truly convinced of it as a reality? Or should he wonder why we have not needed to use this word before? This business of words signalling realities that existed is used so conveniently by different sections. And states of feeling that have no name must wait till we have named them. Language was not an already formed mansion in which we went to live; it is rather a house in the making that exists in and through incompleteness."

This is why the fruit was strange in Holiday's song. Its corporeality was strange on the trees. Abel Meerapal wrote it as a poem in 1937. Holiday sang it in 1939. Most instances of lynching occurred in the US at the turn of the century. But the NAACP records cases of lynching happening as late as in 1968.

The word "lynching" was coined in the 18th century American South in the sense of a legal term. Extra-judicial or not, the contemporary white sensibility perceived it as more or less legitimate, if not a legal action. In the 1930s, with the success of the Civil Rights movement still three decades away, bleeding black bodies on southern trees became strange fruit again. Strange, but real.

Reality calls out for metaphors. Sometimes, it calls out for simple words with straight meanings. There may not be a word for "lynching" yet in most Indian languages. But finally we have arrived in an India where we need one.

The writer is professor of English and creative writing at Ashoka University. His most recent book is the novel *The Scent of God*

Green versus green

On Aarey, a plea to Mumbaikars to give precedence to long-term benefits of Metro



SAVIO RODRIGUES

MUMBAI IS CLEARLY divided over the Aarey Depot issue. On one side, there are citizens who believe that pollution in Mumbai has reached devastating levels with resultant impact on the health of the common Mumbaikar. So, we need to have a robust public transport system, the Mumbai Metro, to ease dependency on vehicular transportation. Their belief is that reduction in vehicular traffic will improve the city's environmental conditions. On the other side, we have citizens who believe that the felling of trees at the Aarey Milk Depot site will further deteriorate the environmental conditions in Mumbai because the city needs to retain its green cover.

To be honest, both groups are logical, both love Mumbai and both are environmentally conscious. To the people of Mumbai, the toughest decision is to be able to balance the long-term environmental benefits with the short-term environmental gains.

The Mumbai Metro Rail Corporation Limited (MMRCL) has felled 2,141 trees. It was granted this permission by the Tree Authority; this permission was challenged at the Bombay High Court. The court dismissed the petition and allowed MMRCL to proceed with its scheduled work on the project. The protestors leading one group of concerned citizens approached the Supreme Court, which has ordered a status quo on the

cutting off trees. I have studied the Mumbai Metro Line-3 (MML-3) project over the last several weeks and have come to understand that MML-3 will carry 17 lakh passengers every day and thereby removing 6.5 lakh vehicle trips off the road, which will, in turn, reduce 2.61 lakh tonnes of CO2 pollution every year. If the same amount of pollution is to be reduced just by planting trees, Mumbai would need more than two crore trees, for which there is no space in the city.

Mumbai is so polluted due to the large number of vehicles in the city. In my understanding, the temporary strain on the environment caused by cutting 2,141 trees at Aarey Milk Colony in terms of CO2 sequestration, will be compensated just by four days of Metro Line 3 operations. The damage envisaged over the trees' lifetime will be compensated by 80 days operations.

The MMRCL in its communication has stated that it has adopted sustainable mitigation measures for the temporary environmental strain the project might cause. It has planted 14,346 trees with 6"x 12" girth and 12-15 feet height of native variety and also planted 9,500 trees as per the Forest Department norms under CSR. A total 23,846 trees have been planted at different locations, including the degraded areas of

Borivali National Park. The trees are of native varieties like Sita Ashok, Kadamb, Arjun and Kanchan. The MMRCL reportedly intends to plant 3,000 more trees and is in discussion with the Maharashtra government to find suitable land to plant these trees.

Every day, at least 10 people die on suburban rail tracks either because of trespassing or by falling from crowded trains. About the same number of people get injured. The loss of 3,500-4,000 lives every year for the past many years has been a matter of great concern for India's financial capital.

Many families have been devastated by the untimely death of their bread earner in such mishaps. Precious lives can be saved only if there is a substantial capacity expansion of rail-based public transport, the Metro. The entire Metro network, I understand, will have the capacity to carry more than one crore passengers by 2041. This would lead to a safer commute on suburban trains as well.

Metro Line-3 will be the most important and efficient corridor of the Mumbai Metro network. It has a huge potential to provide Mumbaikars a safer, more comfortable and reliable mode of transport.

Tree cutting may cause temporary strain to the environment but the benefits of Metro-3 in terms of reduction in pollution, reduction in traffic congestion and saving of lives substantially outweigh this environmental strain.

As a former resident of Mumbai, and someone who travels to Mumbai quite often on work, I am clear that Mumbai needs a robust transport system such as the Metro. I am emotional about the issue, every Mumbaikar would be. But being emotional cannot make us blind to the truth about the dual need of the MML-3: To save the environment and save lives.

Shifting the Metro Aarey Depot is not only illogical at this point of time but also financially unviable. It will also not meet the deadline of the Metro's commencement of operations. The MML-3 project is registered with the United Nations Framework for Climate Change under the Clean Development Mechanism. That gives me confidence that MML-3 project will walk the path of environmental sensitivities and sustainable development.

I appeal to all Mumbaikars. Let's come together to make Mumbai greener with a robust and ecological sound transport system project.

The writer is Founder & Editor-in-Chief, GoaChronicle.com and IndianExpose.com. He is also a social entrepreneur and an environmental rights activist

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

PEOPLE LEFT OUT

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Lessons from Aarey' (IE, October 10). The MMRCL started felling trees immediately after the high court order. This is an example of opaque governance. People are crucial stakeholders in the process of development but are consistently neglected by the government. Aarey is a reminder that without the involvement of people in governance, a development process cannot succeed.

Ravi Deshmukh, Parbhani

VENTURE TRUSTS

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Charity for business' (IE, October 8). In the past, some charitable/religious trusts have tried to manufacture greeting cards, candles and incense sticks. But their cost of production is so high that they become unsaleable. Investment by them in venture capital would cause misuse or wrong investment which would drain funds of trusts. The government should initiate a deposit scheme for investment by trusts which may be used to finance venture capital.

Shobha Ahuja, Parwanoo

PRIVACY VS SECURITY

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Privacy rights and wrongs' (IE, October 11). Article 19 provides freedom of expression but also empowers the government to impose reasonable restrictions on matters related to defamation and

LETTER OF THE WEEK

THEY DO SPEND

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Just blame it on millennials', (IE, October 10). The spending priorities of millennials are definitely from that of the generation preceding. They do not like to invest in real estate or automobiles unless there is a dire need for the same. But millennials are also known to spend on a range of products and services. Generous provision for non-food expenditure is a regular feature of the monthly budget of any millennial. India, in fact, could actually realise the visible benefit of the economic reform of 1991 only after the first batch of millennials entered the job market.

Sudip Kumar Dey, Kolkata

security of state. This means that the government can impose restriction only when a chat in the OTT violates the reasonable restriction mentioned in Article 19(2). But for that, governments will have to read every chat. The government trying to introduce a surveillance state on the pretext of security.

Suchak D Patel, Ahmedabad